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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to determine the basis of the farm wife's involvement in farm tasks, hypotheses regarding farm size and type, family cycle and wife's age, off-farm work of husband or wife, and family educational levels were tested in a 1978 random questionnaire survey of 532 Wisconsin farm families. As expected, wives were more involved with farm operations on dairy farms and on farms that grossed up to $70,000. However, on farms larger than that, wives appeared to be equal partners or to reduce their involvement. Also as expected, farm record keeping was the wife's responsibility, whether she worked off the farm or not, if her educational level exceeded that of her husband. Contrary to expectations, the wife's involvement in physical farm tasks and field work did not decrease when children were young but remained high until the oldest reached 18. This was especially true for less educated women. The wife's physical involvement increased still more if her non-college educated husband worked off the farm. Women with more education apparently had more discretion in doing farm tasks. The needs of both the farm enterprise and the family affected the women's contribution to farming. (SB)

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Involvement of Wives in Farm Tasks as Related to Characteristics of the Farm, the Family and Work Off the Farm*

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Although the family farm has been dominant in American agriculture, there has been relatively little attempt to determine the manner in which family members are involved in the farm enterprise and the consequences of this involvement for both farm and family. Early studies (Beers, 1935; Wilcox and associates, 1932) found the farm wife to have an important effect upon the success of the farm enterprise through her support of her husband and his activities. This was also the main conclusion of a study by Straus of farms in the Columbia River Basin (1958).

A form of the resource theory (Blood and Wolfe, 1960) has been used to explain the relative involvement of the husband and wife in farm decisions (Wilkening, 1958). Aspirations of the wife for the farm and family were also used to explain wife's involvement in farm decisions (Wilkening and Bharadwaj, 1968; Wilkening and Guerrero, 1969). But this has left unexplained the basis of wife's involvement in farm tasks, which is highly associated with her involvement in farm resource and operational decisions. Hence, an approach is needed to explain wife's sharing in or taking over certain farm tasks.

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The approach used here is that the involvement of the wife, as well as other family members, in farm work and decisions grows out of an interaction of the needs and interests of the individual members within the constraints and opportunities provided by the family, the farm and the community. Both farm and family have needs which change over time with the family cycle and with changes in the market, availability of land, labor and off farm work. Wife's involvement then is determined by which of these needs receives priority in determining the wife's work role as viewed by herself, and by her husband within the context of the community and cultural norms. A recent study in Wisconsin finds that farm wives contribute more to farm labor than they did 15 years ago (Dorner and Marquardt, 1978). Does this involvement reflect the changing structure and needs of farm and family or of changes in the resources, interests and opportunities of farm women?

This paper is an attempt to pursue this problem. One rationale is that the contribution of the wife to farm tasks derives from the needs of the farm enterprise if it is to produce an adequate income for the family. The wife helps or takes over certain activities to get them done with less cost and at the appropriate time than would be possible if labor were hired. Increased investment in land, buildings and technology also require more labor at reduced costs to maintain or to increase net income. The second rationale is that the wife's involvement derives from her time as affected by the stage in the family cycle and by the interests and abilities of both husband and wife. Accordingly, the time available for farm work will be affected by the presence of children in the family who require more attention when young and provide assistance in farm and household when older. Beyond the needs and resources of the farm and family the work role of the woman will also be affected by the educational level, off farm work and

other interests and aspirations of husband and wife.

The first hypothesis is that the wife is more involved with the husband in farm-related tasks on dairy farms than on nondairy farms and on larger than on smaller farms which do not have at least some hired labor. The first part of this hypothesis is based upon the assumption that the nature of dairy farming, involving the daily chores of milking and caring for the dairy herd requires a commitment of time and effort not easily obtained from hired labor. The wife and children can effectively help with these chores, from which they may receive personal satisfaction as well as economic returns for the family. The second part of the hypothesis assumes that a larger farm without hiring extra labor requires more help from the wives.

The second hypothesis is that the wife's involvement in farm work is related to the stage in the family cycle and to the wife's age. It is expected that the young wives, before having children, are most highly involved; they become less involved when young children are present and more involved again as family needs for income increase, and, finally, less involved as older children are present to help out and as the wife becomes older and less able to contribute. Complicating this association are variations in the wife's work off the farm, the presence of hired help and the interests of sons and daughters in helping with farm work. Certain of these and other variables will be controlled in assessing the effect of family cycle upon wife's involvement in farm work.

The third hypothesis is that the wife's involvement in chores and field work increases with husband's work off the farm and decreases with the wife's work off the farm. This is based upon the assumption that one spouse working off the farm, whether because of preference for such work or to meet the needs of the family or of the farm, requires more farm work

by the other spouse.

The fourth hypothesis is that wife's involvement in farm record keeping increases with her education and decreases with the husband's education. This is based upon the assumption that record-keeping involves a knowledge of record keeping procedures and regulations pertaining to income tax preparation. Hence, the higher the education of either spouse the greater the likelihood of that spouse assuming responsibility for record keeping and related activities.

Method and Data

Data for the study reported in this paper were obtained from a survey of Wisconsin farm families in the spring of 1978. The survey netted a return of 62 percent of 987 questionnaires sent to a randomly selected list of farm families used for crop and livestock reporting by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture.[1] The sample selected from the survey includes farms from all regions of the state. It excludes single households, leaving 532 farm families. The average age of the husbands is 49 years and of the wives 46 years. Average years of schooling was 10.9 for the husbands and 11.7 for the wives. Two thirds of the sample are dairy farmers and 13 percent are in cash grain, 11 percent in beef, 7 percent in swine production and the remainder in a variety of other enterprises. The average acreage operated is 256 acres, with two thirds of the land in crops. All except four percent own at least part of their farm land operated. Hired labor is reported on

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[1]This study was done in cooperation with Professors Donald Johnson, A. Eugene Havens and Charles Cell of the Departments of Rural Sociology and Sociology as part of a study of change in Wisconsin farming patterns, attitudes and participation in farm organizations supported by the Research Division of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.

26 percent of the farms.

Three indicators of wife's involvement in farm tasks are used. These include doing farm chores such as milking and feeding livestock; field work, usually tractor driving; and keeping farm records and paying the bills, the latter usually include the preparation of income tax returns. While getting farm information from the mass media and from extension was included in the first analysis it is eliminated from this paper since these activities do not involve extensive commitment of time and effort.

The hypotheses are first tested using zero-order correlations, computed from cross tabulations of grouped data. For each test a linear measure of correlation is applied, including family cycle after ruling out the predicted curvilinear relationship. In further analysis, controls are added to interpret the meaning of the observed relationships. Finally, a regression of all the predictor variables upon the wife's involvement in farm tasks is used to specify the contribution of each variable when others are taken into account.

Findings

Compared to a similar study 17 years ago (Wilkening and Bharadwaj, 1966), farm wives in 1978 in Wisconsin are involved about the same extent in farm chores but more involved in field work and in record keeping and paying the bills. About one-third shared equally with their husbands in farm chores, with two-thirds helping at least some (Table 1). One in ten (as compared to 3 percent in 1961) share equally in field work, with three fifths helping at least some. However, almost half (46 percent) of the wives have primary responsibility for record keeping and paying the bills, which was true for only 32 percent in 1961. With increasing paper work farm wives are assuming

more responsibility for this aspect of the farm business but they are also contributing somewhat more to field work involving the use of mechanized equipment.

Type and Size of Farm and Wife's Involvement

As predicted, wives are more involved in various farm tasks on dairy farms than on nondairy farms (see Table 1). Wives are equally involved with their husbands in farm chores on one-third of the dairy farms but on only one fifth of the nondairy farms. Wives also help with field work on two-thirds of the dairy farms but on less than half of the nondairy farms. The wife's greater involvement on dairy farms extends to record keeping, where half as compared with two-fifths on the nondairy farms have primary responsibility for this task. But these differences are observed only for farms without hired labor and small farms below $20,000 gross income (see Table 2). The variety of tasks on dairy farms, more than on beef, hog or grain farms, appears to require a back-up person if not full time help to keep the operation going. This help is more likely to be provided by the wife on dairy farms when resources are scarce.

Based upon the regression analysis, in which all other variables are controlled, wife's involvement in record keeping is not significantly greater on dairy farms after controlling gross farm income. So the differences noted may reflect the fact that dairying, in Wisconsin, tends to be a larger financial operation compared to other types of farming.

The size of farm as indicated by gross farm income varies in its effect on the degree of wife's involvement according to Table 1. At least some assistance from the wife increases with size of farm until the operation exceeds $70,000 gross, when the wife's involvement decreases slightly. But

the wife is more likely to be equally involved with the husband on these very large farms than on those grossing at least $40,000 but less than $70,000. The reason for this is not clear, but it suggests that if the wife is involved in farm tasks on very large farms, she is more likely to be involved as an equal partner rather than as a helper.

This effect of farm size on wife's involvement is observed only for farms with no hired help, and is not observed for dairy farms (see Table 2). This supports the findings above that wives are more involved on dairy farms on smaller operations and in the absence of hired labor. When all variables are taken into account in the regression analysis, the effects of farm size are eliminated when as type of enterprise is controlled.

Family Cycle

The effect of family cycle upon wife's involvement in farm tasks varies from that anticipated according to Table 1. The presence of young children in the family does not reduce the involvement of the wife in farm tasks. In fact, with the exception of involvement in field work, wives whose children are younger than 14 years of age are more likely to be involved in farm tasks. This suggests that wife's involvement in farm tasks is a response to the needs of the farm enterprise to expand as the needs for family income expand.

Wife's help with farm chores and field work does not decrease until the oldest child becomes 18 years or older, and able to take over some of these tasks as increasing age reduces her capacities for the physical work of farming. There is less decline in record keeping by the wife in the later stages in the family cycle.

The correlation of family cycle with wife's involvement in farm chores and field work is somewhat higher for nondairy farms than for dairy farms (not shown), suggesting that wives on dairy farms are less likely to decrease their assistance late in the family cycle. The greater involvement of wives in farm tasks during the early stages of family cycle are significant only in the absence of hired labor (see Table 2).

Wife's work off the farm eliminates the effect of family cycle on her involvement in farm chores and record keeping but increases the effect on her involvement in field work. This suggests that wives who work off the farm reduce their help with field work in later stages of the family cycle more than do other wives.

When all variables are controlled in the regression, wife's involvement declines with family cycle for farm chores and field work but not significantly for record keeping. In other analyses (not shown) wife's help with record keeping increases as children take over farm work, counteracting other effects of the family cycle. Looking at the effect of each stage of the family cycle upon wife's task involvement (before entering the regression equation) the wife's reduction in farm chores occurs when the oldest child is 18 years or older and in field work when the children are gone. The effect of family cycle is in part a function of age of husband and wife but also of family composition, suggesting that need for wife's involvement may be high when young children are present.

Off Farm Work of Husband and Wife

The third hypothesis, that husband's work off the farm increases wife's involvement in farm tasks, is not supported by the data reported in Table 1. But when other variables are controlled in the regression, husband's work off

the farm increases the wife's involvement in farm chores and field work. This is accounted for by the differences between dairy and nondairy farms. Almost three fifths of nondairy farmers work off the farm, with wives not significantly assuming responsibility for farm tasks. Only one sixth of dairy farmers work off the farm, and their wives do become more involved in physical tasks (see Table 2). It is also observed that the wives of less educated farmers become more involved in physical tasks when their husbands work off the farm; but the wives of college educated working husbands are significantly less involved (see Table 2).

When the wife works off the farm she tends to give up helping with the farm chores and field work but not the record keeping and paying the bills. Wives who are working off the farm are as responsible for the records and farm money matters as those who are at home. Their involvement in farm chores and field work is more likely to decline if they have some college than if they do not (see Table 2). But educated wives who work off the farm do not discontinue with record keeping. This finding suggests that the greater her education the more discretion she has in doing farm tasks.

Education of Husband and Wife

Husband's education has no significant observed effect upon wife's help with field work or record keeping, according to the first level analysis, but has some negative association with her involvement in chores. But when other variables, primarily the wife's education, are taken into account his education has a negative impact only on her help with record keeping, as predicted.

Although the more educated wife is less likely to perform chores and field work, according to the zero-order analysis, this does not appear to

affect her responsibility for record keeping. Education reduces help with farm chores only for the older wives, 45 years and older (see Table 2). This reflects the fact that education and work off the farm are associated for older wives (not shown). As for the husbands, the controlled regression analysis demonstrates a significant impact of wifes' education on her involvement in record keeping, in the predicted positive direction. Hence, the hypothesis is supported that record keeping tends to be performed by the person with most education.

Discussion

The results of this study support the notion that dairy farming provides a greater need for the wife's involvement in farm tasks than have other livestock or grain farms. The help of the wife and children in performing daily chores and field work cannot be easily replaced by hired help without considerable investment in dairy herd size, buildings and milking equipment to justify a full time hired person. The regular economic return to the family also provides an incentive for their efforts.

There is some evidence that as the farm business increases beyond an optimum size the wife either reduces her involvement or becomes more of an equal partner in the enterprise. Her choice to become involved on the largest farms may be accompanied by an understanding with her husband that she will have an influence on decisions and gain recognition for her role. Support for this notion awaits further study.

Off farm work of the husband, if he is less educated, provides a need for more help from the wife with physical tasks, at least on dairy farms. As the opportunities for expansion of farms decrease and capital costs for such expansion increase, off farm work to accumulate capital or supplement

income is likely to increase. This shifts more responsibility to farm women to assist with the farm chores and field work if the husband takes an off farm job. If off farm opportunities for farm women are equal to those for the men will they choose, instead, to follow nonfarm interests? Our data suggest that with some college education, farm women are more likely to work off the farm, thereby reducing their farm work but not their responsibility for keeping records and paying the bills. Wife's increasing assumption of this latter role supports the efforts of some extension programs to provide record keeping skills and management training specifically for farm women.

The involvement of the wife in farm work in the early stages of the family cycle, with less involvement in later stages, is somewhat contrary to the notion that family needs take precedence over the needs of the farm enterprise. But with smaller families, more conveniences in the home and a husband possibly sharing household tasks, the wife can be more involved in farm chores and field work in the early stages when there is a need for her help and when she is physically able. This declines as children begin to help with farm tasks and she is physically less able. It may also be that younger farm women have a greater interest in getting into farm work to develope a greater identify with an income producing role which has personal, social and economic rewards.

In conclusion, it appears that the needs of the farm enterprise as well as those of the family affect the contribution of women to farming. But the assumption of farm tasks, including record keeping, are also dependent upon how the interests and abilities of the husband and wife interact with nonfarm opportunities to affect the wife's work role. Problems for further study include the effect of the wife's farm work role on her involvement in farm and family decisions and on her personal sense of well-being.

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TABLE 2. Correlation Coefficients of Wife's Involvement in Farm Chores, Field Work and Farm Record Keeping by Type of Farm, Gross Farm Income, Stage of the Family Cycle and Work Off the Farm and Education of Husband and Wife, Controlling Selected Independent Variables, and Beta Coefficients Controlling All Other Independent Variables.

Independent Variables and Control Variables:	Association with Wife's Involvement in:					
	Farm Chores		Field Work		Farm Record Keeping	
	r	β	r	β	r	β
Dairy Rather than Nondairy Enterprise	.16**	.12*	.17**	.14**	.10*	.08
Hired labor: none	.23**		.24**		.15**	
some	-.07		.00		-.01	
Gross farm income:						
Less than $20,000	.24**		.26**		.11*	
$20,000 to $39,999	.09		.12		.04	
$40,000 or more	.06		.01		.06	
Gross Farm Income	.08*	.06	.08*	.03	.07	.07
Hired labor: none	.17**		.17**		.12*	
some	.05		.01		.07	
Type of enterprise: nondairy	.07		.12		.02	
dairy	-.02		-.05		.04	
Stage of the Family Cycle	-.14**	-.12**	-.17**	-.15**	-.09*	-.09
Hired labor: none	-.14**		-.19**		-.12*	
some	-.15		-.05		-.03	
Wife's work off farm: none	-.17**		-.14**		-.09*	
some	-.03		-.27**		-.07	
Husband's Work Off the Farm	.04	.16**	.02	.14**	-.01	.06
Type of enterprise: nondairy	.15		.02		-.05	
dairy	.10*		.15**		.09*	
Husband's education:						
High school or less	-.11*		-.06		-.01	
Some college	-.32**		-.23*		-.04	
Wife's Work Off the Farm	-.17**	-.15**	-.16**	-.15**	-.01	.01
Wife's education:						
High school or less	-.14**		-.12*		-.05	
Some college	-.20*		-.21*		.07	
Husband's Education	-.08*	-.10	-.07	-.07	-.04	-.16**
Wife's Education	-.11**	-.03	-.09*	-.03	.02	.14**
Wife's age: less than 45 years	-.01		-.08		-.01	
45 years or older	-.21**		-.19		.04	

*P<.05
**P<.01

TABLE 1. Cumulative Percentages and Coefficients of Correlation of Wife's Involvement in Farm Chores, Field Work and Farm Record Keeping by Type of Farm, Gross Farm Income, Stage of the Family Cycle and Work Off the Farm and Education of Husband and Wife.

Independent Variables:	Number of Families[a]	Cumulative Percentage of Wives Involved in: Farm Chores: As Much as Husband or More	Farm Chores: At Least Some	Field Work: As Much as Husband or More	Field Work: At Least Some	Farm Record Keeping: Wife Entirely	Farm Record Keeping: Wife more than Husband	Farm Record Keeping: As Much as Husband or More
TOTAL	532	32%	69%	10%	60%	21%	47%	67%
Type of Farm Enterprise	532							
Nondairy	180	21	58	8	47	18	41	60
Dairy	352	35	72	11	66	23	50	70
		(r=.16, P<.001)		(r=.17, P<.001)			(r=.10, P<.05)	
Gross Farm Income	491[b]							
Less than $5,000	77	20	58	7	47	18	46	64
$5,000 to $19,999	113	25	70	9	62	21	47	65
$20,000 to $39,999	119	38	74	13	60	19	45	70
$40,000 to $69,999	100	30	74	7	65	22	51	71
$70,000 or more	82	38	62	10	63	31	54	67
		(r=.08, P<.05)		(r=.08, P<.05)			(r=.07, P<.10)	
Stage of the Family Cycle	511[c]							
No children, wife less than 45	62	33	75	10	75	25	44	64
Oldest child less than age 14	78	42	75	15	58	27	59	74
Oldest child age 14 to 17	82	41	72	13	73	20	54	77
Oldest child age 18 or older	167	24	67	8	58	20	42	64
Children gone, wife 45+ or older	122	26	57	6	46	19	42	60
		(r=-.14, P<.01)		(r=-.17, P<.001)			(r=-.09, P<.05)	
Husband's Work Off the Farm	532							
None	392	30	69	9	60	21	47	65
1 to 149 days	24	46	63	13	67	13	38	65
150 days or more	116	35	70	12	61	25	48	63
		(r=.04, n.s.)		(r=.02, n.s.)			(r=-.01, n.s.)	
Wife's Work Off the Farm	532							
None	431	36	71	11	63	22	47	67
1 to 149 days	29	24	66	14	62	14	52	72
150 days or more	72	12	57	3	39	21	47	65
		(r=.17, P<.001)		(r=-.16, P<.001)			(r=-.01, n.s.)	
Husband's Education	502[d]							
High school or less	431	33	70	10	61	21	47	68
Some college or more	71	23	60	6	53	23	45	56
		(r=-.08, P<.05)		(r=-.07, P<.10)			(r=-.04, n.s.)	
Wife's Education	499[e]							
High school or less	399	35	70	10	63	22	46	67
Some college or more	100	21	61	10	48	23	53	65
		(r=-.11, P<.01)		(r=-.09, P<.05)			(r=.02, n.s.)	

[a]Included in this column but excluded from these computations are: 80 families who do no farm chores, 34 families who do no field work and 20 families who keep no farm books.

[b]Forty-one respondents do not report gross farm income.

[c]Twenty-one respondents do not report family composition.

[d]Thirty respondents do not report husband's education.

[e]Thirty-three respondents do not report wife's education.

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Independent Variables and Control Variables:	Association with Wife's Involvement in:					
	Farm Chores		Field Work		Farm Record Keeping	
	r	β	r	β	r	β
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$40,000 or more	.06		.01		.06	
Gross Farm Income	.08*	.05	.08*	.03	.07	.07
Hired labor: none	.17**		.17**		.12*	
some	.05		.01		.07	
Type of enterprise: nondairy	.07		.12		.02	
dairy	-.02		-.05		.04	
Stage of the Family Cycle	-.14**	-.12**	-.17**	-.15**	-.09*	-.09
Hired labor: none	-.14**		-.19**		-.12*	
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Wife's work off farm: none	-.17**		-.14**		-.09*	
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Wife's Work Off the Farm	-.17**	-.15**	-.16**	-.15**	-.01	.01
Wife's education:						
High school or less	-.14**		-.12*		-.05	
Some college	-.20*		-.21*		.07	
Husband's Education	-.08*	-.10	-.07	-.07	-.04	-.16**
Wife's Education	-.11**	-.03	-.09*	-.03	.02	.14**
Wife's age: less than 45 years	-.01		-.08		-.01	
45 years or older	-.21**		-.09		.04	

*P<.05
**P<.01